



Illawarra Centre for Enablement

**YOUTH  
COUNCIL**

# COVID-19 Illawarra Youth Survey Report 2021

By ICfE Youth Council:

Alvin Chung, Amar Sultan, Ben Healey, Tristan James, Ben Johns & Ishan Datar

December 2021

## Illawarra Centre for Enablement (ICfE)


The Illawarra Centre for Enablement (ICfE)'s Youth Council, formed in July 2021, launched an online Youth Survey on 23 August 2021 to understand the experiences, views and concerns of all youth in the Illawarra in relation to the COVID-19 Pandemic, so that they could advocate on their behalf to improve how issues affecting them, that are related to COVID-19, are being addressed.

Based on their analysis of their Youth Survey data, the Youth Council makes the following recommendations for youth in the Illawarra:

1. **Communication of the current COVID-19** pandemic needs to be centralised and easily made available to youth through targeted youth engagement platforms including social media, news programmes, educational institutions, workplaces and the community. This includes essential information regarding lockdown, restrictions and updates that target diverse youth and utilise the channels that their community engages in and increase their awareness of what services are available to them.
2. **Mental health clinics** must offer mental health services that are accessible and do not discriminate at any level, thus granting all youth the freedom to engage in appropriate strategies to cope with their mental health concerns, from basic to more serious concerns. Models such as those under the 'Head to Health Pop Up'<sup>1</sup> model, as well as services offered by Secondary High Schools and UOW for counselling can be made available to a wider range of youth in communities across the Illawarra.
3. **Effective ways for reducing stress** in being identified in this study by youth, should be used in mental health awareness campaigns in the Illawarra and on a wider scale. Strategies such as doing things one loves and being with friends and family proved to be effective ways of coping and should be advertised via the media to youth, and to raise awareness in the community of the benefit of reaching out and connecting with youth.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health, NSW Government, 2021. Head to Health Pop Up services in NSW and ACT. Available at <https://www.headtohealth.gov.au/popup>

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4. **Information on COVID-19 vaccines** and their availability must be adapted so that youth from diverse communities are able to better understand and make informed choices as to their health. This would assist in alleviating the stress and anxiety that youth experience due to the lack of access to critical information regarding availability of vaccines during the pandemic and which vaccines suit them.
  5. **Vaccines** need to be more readily available for all youth. Youth should be able to book and receive their vaccinations without hassle and as soon as possible. The list of essential workers needs to be expanded to include those who do not have the option to work from home.
  6. **Further research** is required to identify how youth with disabilities in the Illawarra are coping with COVID-19 challenges, and how they can be supported so that they receive integrated care and regularly updated information.
  7. **Funding** is needed by local, regional and state governments to fund adequate and relevant mental health services for youth in the Illawarra. Basic and high level services ranging from avenues for youth to network and communicate what is on their mind, discussion groups with peers to professional counselling services would effectively address the gaps in mental health services for youth in the Illawarra during this pandemic.

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## Illawarra Centre for Enablement Director's Message

This landmark report by the ICfE's Youth Council is significant given the continuing prevalence of the COVID-19 variant and its ongoing impacts on youth in the Illawarra.

The Youth Council which formed in July 2021 worked diligently to formulate a Youth Survey by August 2021, and based on their analysis of the data, present their evidence of youth experiences and insights of the pandemic to address the gaps in service information and provision to assist youth in the Illawarra.

It is commendable that 134 youth across the Illawarra responded to their online Survey at such a critical period during the second wave of COVID-19 with the Delta strain causing further havoc on so many fronts for youth.

The critical need for mental health servicing and information is loud and clear in the Council's findings. Although the Council's findings relate to the impacts of the second wave of the COVID-19 variant and its more potent Delta strain in 2021, with the emergence of the Omicron variant, it is important that the Youth Council's seven recommendations in this Report are taken seriously by government and non-government organisations, policy and decision makers to improve how they engage and assist youth as the COVID-19 crisis evolves.

The Youth Council are to be commended for developing their leadership capacity to shape their individual and collective voice as regional youth leaders in the Illawarra, and for contributing the evidence for change to benefit Illawarra's youth.

The support they have received from regional and political leaders, including Member for Kiama, The Hon Gareth Ward MP, The Hon Fiona Phillips MP, The Hon Sharon Bird MP and Debra Murphy, CEO of RDA Illawarra, as well as a number of government and non-government organisations in the Illawarra is tremendously appreciated as Members of the Council have learned about collaborating to build momentum for youth voices to be heard, and how youth leadership can constructively advocate for change.

It has been my privilege to develop the leadership capacity of the Youth Council Members through the development and finalisation of their Youth Survey and Report to benefit them and youth in the Illawarra.

Dr Diann Rodgers-Healey  
Director, Illawarra Centre for Enablement (ICfE)



## Statements of Endorsement



### STATEMENT OF SUPPORT

I am very pleased to support COVID-19 Illawarra Youth Survey Conducted by the Illawarra Centre for Enablement (ICfE) Youth Council.

This report delves into the experiences and views of youth in our region during the pandemic. The report brought to light the impact on the personal and professional life, well-being, mental health, and experiences of youth.

The work done by Alvin Chung, Amar Sultan, Ben Johns, Ben Healey, Ishan Datar and Tristan James is commendable. This report, organised by youth for youth allows an invaluable window into the lives and experiences of youth in our region.

The 50 page report delves into the unique views and experiences of 134 youth participants in our region with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I was pleased to read the ICfE's Youth Council Youth Survey Report. The recommendations are comprehensive given youth mental health in our region. I recommend taking time to thoroughly read the report.

I look forward to forwarding the recommendations to responsible Ministers for their action.

Yours sincerely,

**GARETH WARD MP**  
Member for Kiama

*Working for Our Community*





## FIONA PHILLIPS MP

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR GILMORE



20 December 2021

### Statement of Endorsement

I am pleased to support ICfE's Youth Council Youth Survey Report 2021.

Over the last two years, I have been fighting for more mental health services for young people in Gilmore, improving the mental health and wellbeing of our young people is vitally important.

COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns over the last two years have added significant challenges and barriers for young people finding and accessing help and support.

The Youth Council has surveyed young people directly and when compiling this report the process reached out to young people from all backgrounds including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, youth with disabilities and youth who identify as LGBTQI.

The Youth Council should be commended for their hard work in putting this survey together. The report will go a long way to providing, local, state and federal governments valuable insights into the needs of young people in our community.

I congratulate Alvin Chung, Amair Sultan, Ben Healey, Tristan James, Ben Johns and Ishan Datar from ICfE Youth Council for their incredibly hard work and dedication for researching, surveying and compiling this report.

Once again, I am pleased to support the ICfE's Youth Council Youth Survey Report.

If I can be of any help, please don't hesitate to call my office on 4423 1782 or email me at [Fiona.Phillips.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Fiona.Phillips.MP@aph.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

Fiona Phillips MP  
Member for Gilmore



**Sharon Bird MP**

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

### STATEMENT OF ENDORSEMENT

I am pleased to support ICfE's Youth Council Youth Survey Report 2021. Listening to the voices of young people in our community has never been more important. With disruptions to schooling and social connections over the last two years as they dealt with the Covid restrictions has meant that young people have been particularly impacted. It is good to have a report that has surveyed them directly and provided a voice.

I applaud the 6 Youth Council members who have worked very hard to compile the 50 page report that is based on the 134 Illawarra youth responses to this Survey from August to the end of September this year.

Participants were invited to participate in the Illawarra Youth Survey to help understand their experiences, views and concerns about the COVID-19 Pandemic. This survey reached out to youth from all backgrounds including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, youth with disabilities, multicultural youth and youth who identify as LBGTIQ.

I am very pleased to see that the ICfE's Youth Council Youth Survey Report 2021, is considerably detailed and the recommendations are quite significant given the ongoing situation and youth mental health service and information gaps.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Sharon Bird'.

SHARON BIRD MP  
MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM



Debra Murphy, CEO Regional Development Australia (RDA Illawarra)



Regional  
Development  
*Australia*

I L L A W A R R A

*"I confirm that we endorse this report, and commend the ICfE for the innovative approach to working with youth in our community."*

Debra Murphy, CEO Regional Development Australia (RDA Illawarra)

## Acknowledgements

The Youth Council, first and foremost acknowledges that the Youth Survey and this Report takes place on the land of the Wodi Wodi (or Wadi Wadi) people, who are a part of the Dharawal Nation.

The Council is grateful to all the Illawarra youth who took part in the Youth Survey, especially given the challenges during the Survey period due to the pandemic.

The Youth Council also wishes to acknowledge the encouragement and assistance of the Centre's Director, Dr Diann Rodgers-Healey, the Centre's Ambassador-in-Chief, Dr Michael Barbato, as well as the generous support and endorsement of this Report by the Hon Gareth Ward MP.

Special thanks are extended to all the community leaders, not-for-profit and corporate organisations listed below and the University of Wollongong for their special assistance in promoting the Youth Survey extensively to youth in the Illawarra.

- The Hon Fiona Phillips MP
- The Hon Gareth Ward MP
- The Hon Sharon Bird MP
- Alison Bradford, Community Development & Engagement Manager, Wollongong City Council
- Annemarie Vanags
- Avalon Bourne, Program Director, Sonder
- Ben Blackburn
- Benjamin Hamill, Student Advisory Council, University of Wollongong
- Carol Kiernan
- Cathy Law and James Wallner, The Bugle
- Chris Lacey, CEO MCCI
- Councillor Kathy Rice, Kiama Council
- Debbie Lee, NSW Sector Development Officer, First Peoples Disability Network (Australia)
- Debra Murphy and Eddy de Gabrielle, RDA Illawarra
- Dr Michael Barbato
- Elicia Ford, National Disability Coordination Officer at Centre for Disability Studies
- Emma Rodrigues, ISLHD
- Fillmores Music Kiama
- Georgie Summerville
- Ian Butler, University Relations Coordinator, University of Wollongong
- Ian Fulford
- Jake Pearson, CEO, Interchange Illawarra

- Jaymee Beveridge, CEO Woolyungah Indigenous Centre
- Jess Moore, CEO, Community Resources
- Jodi Edwards
- Joshua Karras
- June Lowe OAM, Aboriginal Engagement Officer, Mission Australia
- Katelyn Milevski, Marketing & Content Manager, Parents Guide Illawarra & What's On In Wollongong
- Katherine Daly
- Katie Kapp, Coordinator Youth Services, Wollongong City Council
- Kelly Salmon, Senior Alumni Relations Coordinator, University of Wollongong
- Kerry Hunt, Director Community Services, Wollongong City Council
- Keza Kat
- Kholoud Alkayid
- Leanne McKay
- Lee Sharam
- Matt George, General Manager, Jamberoo Action Park
- Nick Guggisberg, Manager Community and Cultural Development, Kiama Municipal Council
- Nicky Sloan, CEO, Community Industry Group
- Peter Maywald, Secretary Neighbourhood Forum 7
- Pippa Rendel
- Professor Grace McCarthy, Dean of Business, School of Business, University of Wollongong
- Professor Patricia Davidson, Vice Chancellor, University of Wollongong
- Rebecca Schmidt-Lachlan, Altered Abilities
- Rev Kath Merrifield, Kiama-Jamberoo Uniting Church
- Richard Davis, Aboriginal Enterprise Development Officer, The Illawarra ITeC
- Rod Clark, Executive Manager Life Choices and Support, Flagstaff
- Sallie Louise Fredericks
- Sammi, Headspace Nowra
- Sandra Pires
- SCARF
- Sharon Wingate, Executive Officer, The Illawarra Connection
- Shoalhaven Regional Gallery
- Southern Youth and Family Services
- Susan Wallis
- Tanya Leonardi, Coordinator, Community Connections, Wollongong Council
- Thomas Quinn, Manager, Clubs, Volunteering and Wellness Programs, University of Wollongong Pulse
- Victoria Langford
- Vivienne Kish
- Xanthe Knox, Associate Director, Student Operations, University of Wollongong

## Executive Summary

The Youth Survey for youth 18-26 years old in the Illawarra was designed and conducted by the Illawarra Centre for Enablement's Youth Council. The online Survey ran from 23 August 2021 to 21 September 2021. It focused on finding out about the experiences and views of diverse youth in the Illawarra during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in relation to how it impacted their personal and professional life, their well-being and mental health, and their experiences and insights about vaccinations and the lockdown.

134 youth responded to the Youth Survey with the predominant group being 18-19-year-olds. 81% identified as Australian, 5% were from an Indigenous background and 14% identified to be from a foreign ethnicity. 14.2% of participants identified as persons living with a disability. Most of the participants were studying in University (36.6%) and at High School (15.7%). 33.6% were not currently studying.

While over half of participants did not want the Astrazeneca Vaccine (52%), a majority of essential workers at the time of the Survey had experienced notable barriers in wanting and attaining the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine (63%). 22% had to grapple with eligibility issues for vaccinations.

A notable portion of participants rated their education (37.3%), mental health (35.1%), employment (30.6%), and relationships (28.4%) as areas significantly affected by COVID-19.


67% of participants listed being "concerned" or "extremely concerned" about their mental health. Other significant areas of concern were the participants' family, studies, and their physical health.

When youth were asked about their current mental health and wellbeing, 27.6% rated these areas as 'good' or better, 44% as fair, and 26.1% as 'poor' or worse.

64.2% of participants had not accessed any form of mental health services during the lockdown periods.

Of those who did access mental health services, 14.9% of youth rated the services as 'fair' or worse and 19.4% rated them as 'good.'

56% of participants were 'somewhat aware' of the mental health services, whilst 8.2% were not aware and 35.8% were fully aware.



6.7% said they did think that adequate support had been provided to those with disability during the pandemic; 35.8% answered no, and 57.4% were not sure or had not thought about it.

In terms of where participants received their information about COVID-19 from, 68.7% gained it from social media, 62.7% from television news, 60.4% from the NSW Health website, 36.6% from word of mouth, 24.6% from radio, and 11.9% from internet forums.

The Survey findings point to an emergence of significant themes to do with gaps in mental health servicing and information, COVID-19 information and Vaccination, and availability issues during the Survey period.

Although a substantial number of participants claimed to have poor or worse current mental health and wellbeing, a significant portion of participants had not accessed any mental health services or claimed to be only 'somewhat aware' of them. This potentially signifies a disconnect between how young people are feeling, the ease of access and availability of mental health services, and the communication of mental health services for young people.

The Youth Council's seven recommendations address improving communication to youth about COVID-19 being centralised; the provision of more mental health services for youth in the Illawarra; the promotion of Illawarra youth's tried and tested stress-coping strategies to youth widely; adapting the information about COVID-19 vaccines for youth from diverse communities; making vaccines more readily available and extending it to non-essential workers; conducting further research of the impact of COVID-19 on youth; and increasing funding for mental health service provision.

## Background and Methodology

The Youth Survey by the Youth Council was designed to explore the experiences and views of diverse youth in the Illawarra<sup>2</sup> during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in relation to how it impacted their personal and professional life, their well-being and mental health, and their experiences and insights about vaccinations.

Recognising that there were other surveys exploring these issues as experienced by youth nationally, the Youth Survey was significant as it delved into the experiences and concerns of Illawarra youth and took into account the particular circumstances that evolved during the Survey period, including the status of vaccinations and the lockdown restrictions as they impacted the Illawarra.

The Survey findings point to an emergence of significant themes to do with gaps in mental health servicing and information, COVID-19 information and Vaccination, and availability issues during the Survey period.

Due to the timing of the survey being in the middle of the second COVID-19 lockdown, and the information available through the local and national media about youth challenges during this time<sup>3</sup>, as well as ongoing national youth surveys such as the Mission Australia Youth Survey and Report (2020 & 2021)<sup>4</sup>, the Youth Council decided to focus on finding out how youth were coping with the second wave of COVID-19 and what could assist them during that time.

The Survey was created as an online survey using Google Docs and consisted of 30 questions. Participants were advised at the start of the Survey that their responses were confidential and the analysis would be presented as an aggregate.

Questions focused on experiences of the COVID-19 impact on study and occupation, mental health and well-being, and community engagement concerns. Questions also focused on the availability of mental health services, whether participants knew about mental health services that were available to them and how information

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<sup>2</sup> The Illawarra region is a narrow coastal strip from the south/south western outskirts of Sydney down to the northern boundary with the Shoalhaven and south coast of NSW. The Illawarra region includes the three local government areas of Wollongong, Shellharbour and Kiama. The Illawarra has a population of 305,050. <https://www.rdaillawarra.com.au/our-region/>

<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. COVID-19 and the impact on young people. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/covid-19-and-young-people>

<sup>4</sup> Mission Australia, 2021. Annual Youth Survey. Available at <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/research-impact-policy-advocacy/youth-survey>; Mission Australia Youth Survey Report 2021. Available at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/research-impact-policy-advocacy/youth-survey>



was communicated to them regarding the restrictions and the vaccinations. A copy of the Survey is in the Appendices in this Report.

In order to advertise the survey to get a broad representation of youth, the Survey sought to attract the responses of diverse youth in the Illawarra including males, females, agender/non-gendered and non-binary youth, as well as youth with disabilities; Indigenous youth, and culturally and linguistically diverse youth.

The Survey was launched online on 23 August 2021 and closed on 21 September 2021 at 11.59pm. Local Members of Parliament were contacted as well as a range of government organisations, not-for-profit organisations, local businesses, TAFE and the University of Wollongong, ICfE's networks and members that were also contacted via email and social media.

Following the Survey's closure, the Youth Council took on specific responsibilities to analyse the data. Their specific roles were:

**Alvin Chung - Project Manager**

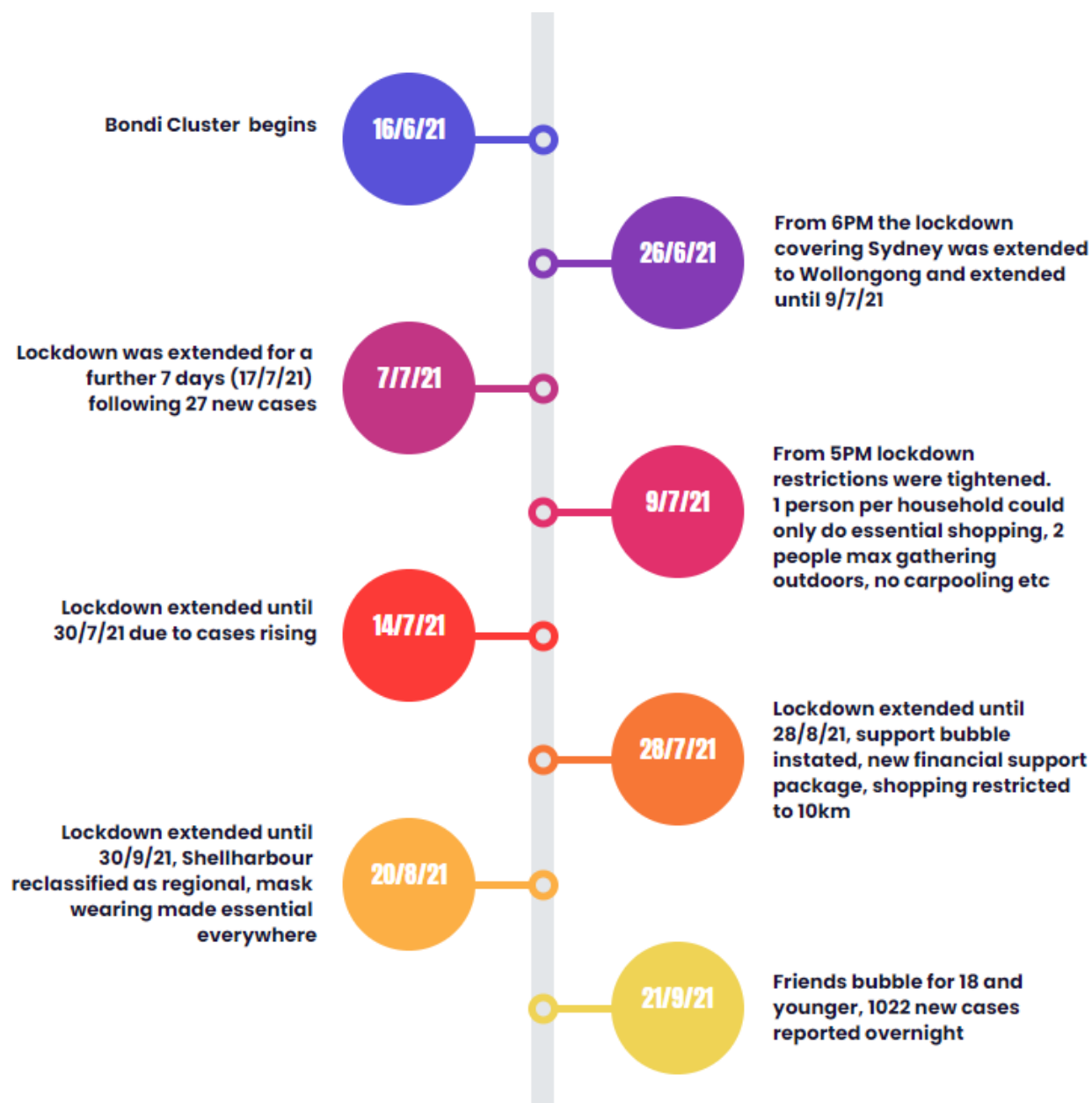
**Team 1: Tristan James (Team Leader); Ben Johns; Ishan Datar**

**Team 2: Ben Healey (Team Leader); Amar Sultan; Alvin Chung**

For the Report, Team 1 presented all the background information and results and Team 2 was responsible for the Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations in this Report. Both Teams had to sign off on the final Report and Recommendations.

## Timeline

To provide context for what was happening prior to and during the Survey in relation to the rise of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 in New South Wales and Australia, below are some statistics and infographics.



## Number of new cases of COVID-19 by reported date in the last 24 hours

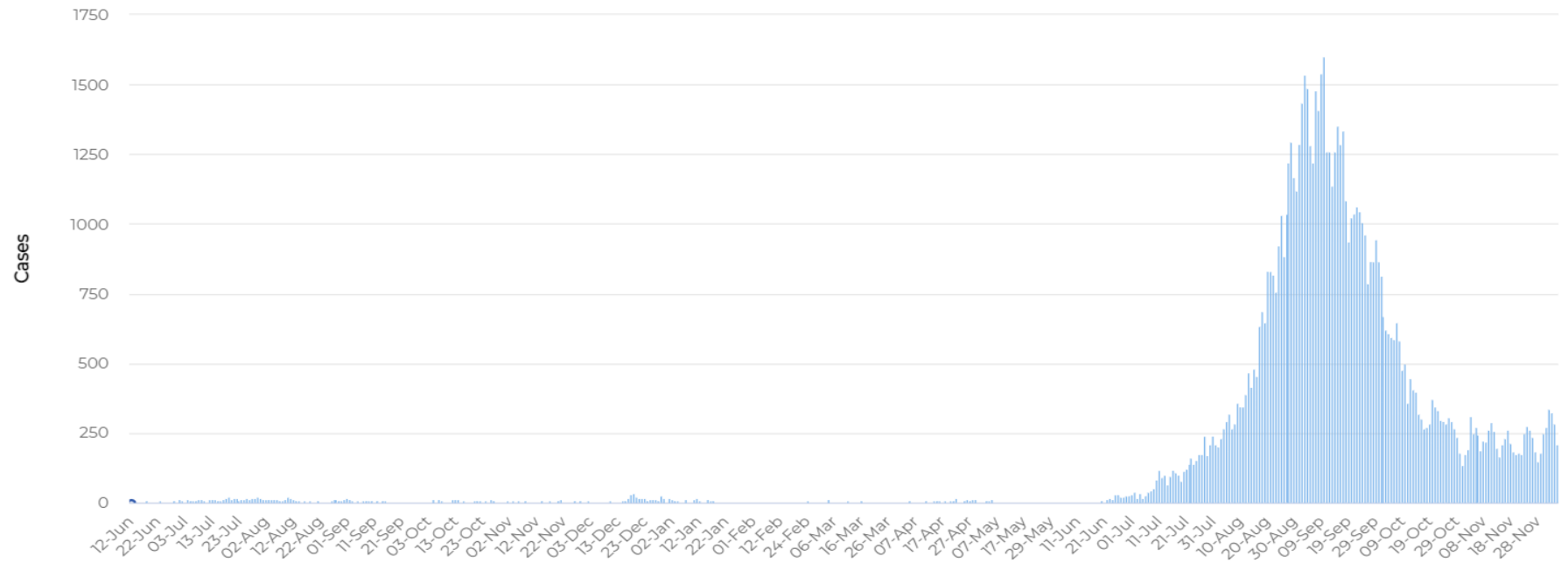


Figure 1: COVID-19 cases from 12 June 2021 to 28 November 2021

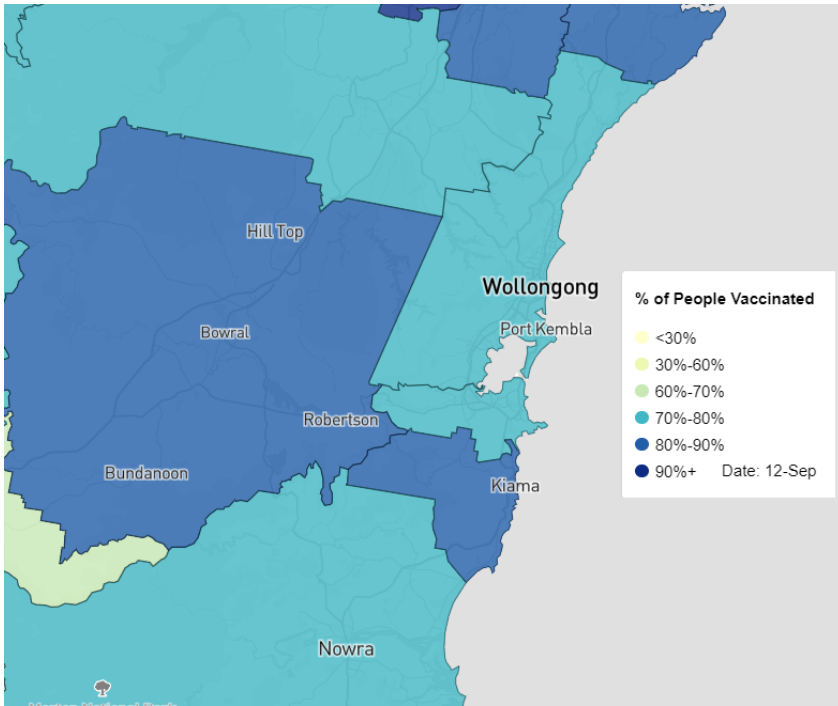


Figure 2: Vaccinations by LGA at peak COVID-19 cases

### Vaccinations administered (cumulative)

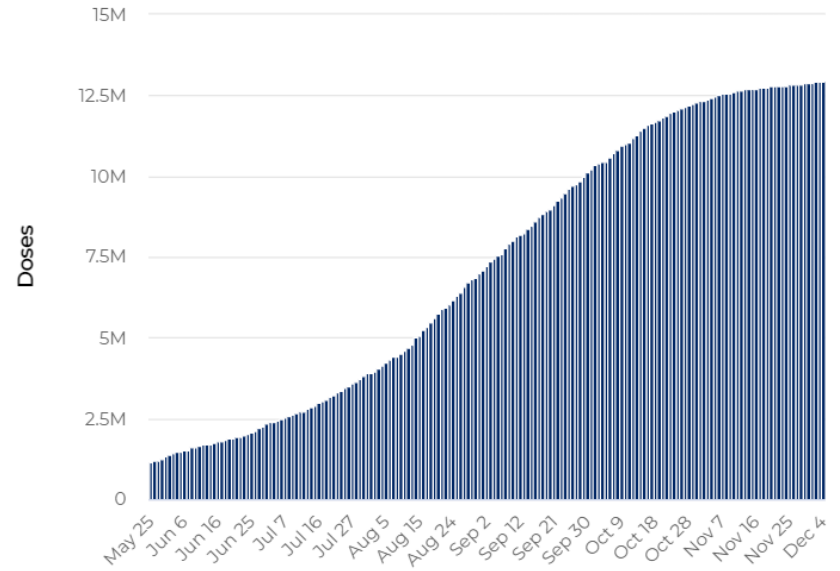


Figure 3: Vaccines administered

## Results

134 youth responded to the Youth Survey for youth 18-26 years old in the Illawarra. As seen in Figure 4, there was a fairly even age range of participants, with the predominant group being 18-19 year olds.

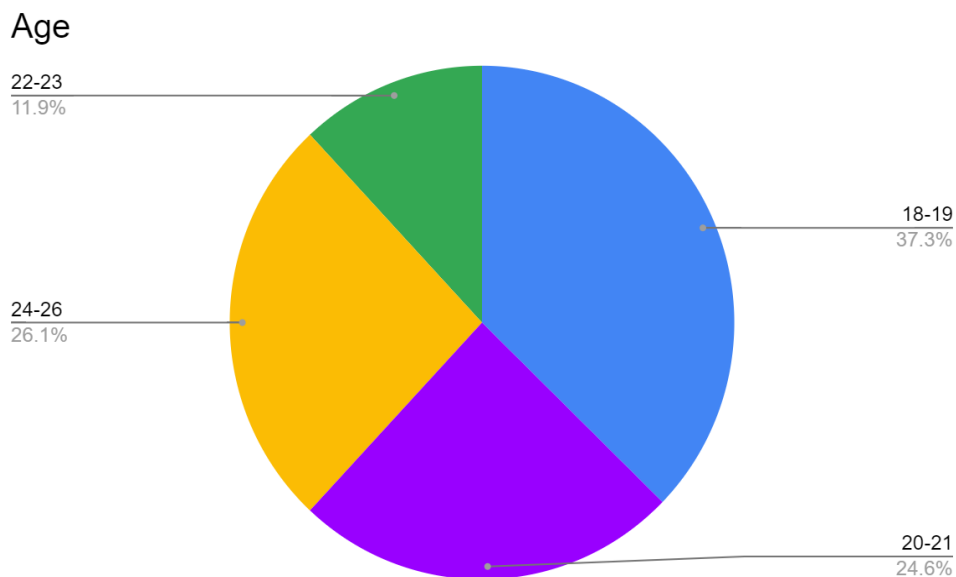


Figure 4: Age range

A significant majority of youth identified as living regionally (71.6%) as shown in Figure 5.

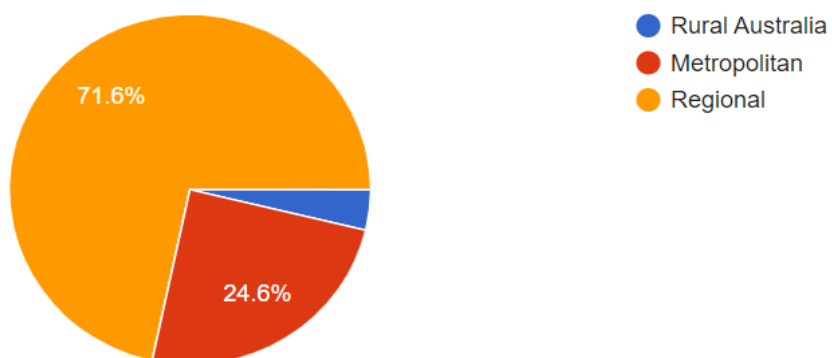


Figure 5: Location

In terms of specific postcode location in the Illawarra, Figure 6 presents the range that was provided by participants. 17.9% were from 2533 which is the postcode for Bombo; Curramore; Jamberoo; Jerrara; Kiama; Kiama Downs; Kiama Heights; Minnamurra and Saddleback Mountain. 16.4% were from postcode 2500 in Wollongong and 10.4% were from Albion Park; Albion Park Rail; Calderwood; Croom; Tongarra; Tullimbar and Yellow Rock.

134 responses

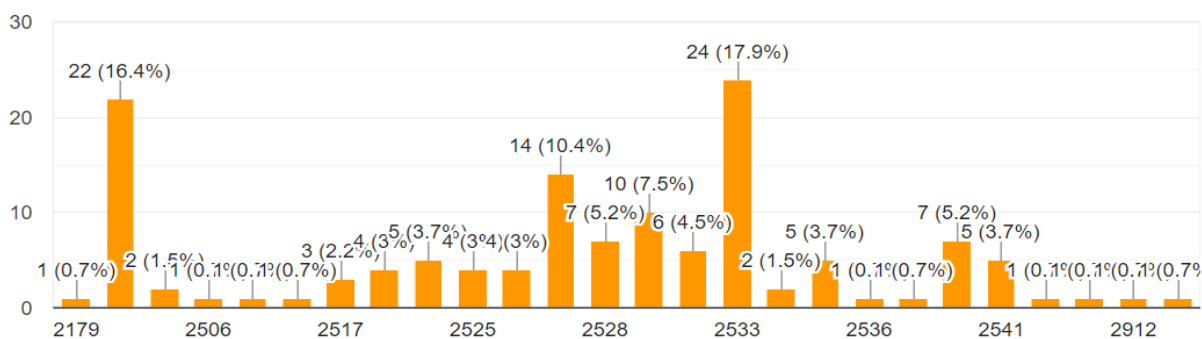


Figure 6: Postcode location of participants

66.4% of participants were living with family and were still at home; 14.2% lived with friends and housemates; 10.4% with their partner; and 6% lived alone.

While over half of participants did not want the Astrazeneca Vaccine (51.52%), a majority of essential workers at the time of the Survey had experienced notable barriers in wanting and attaining the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine (63%), as shown in Figure 7.

### Essential workers facing vaccination issues

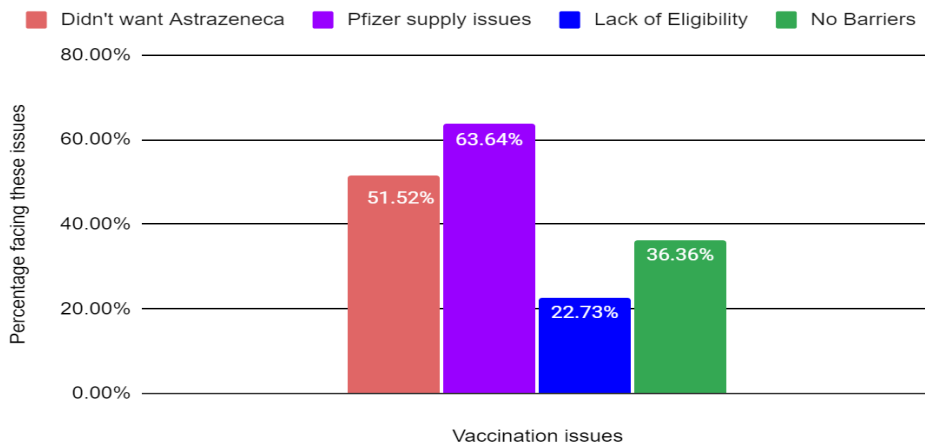
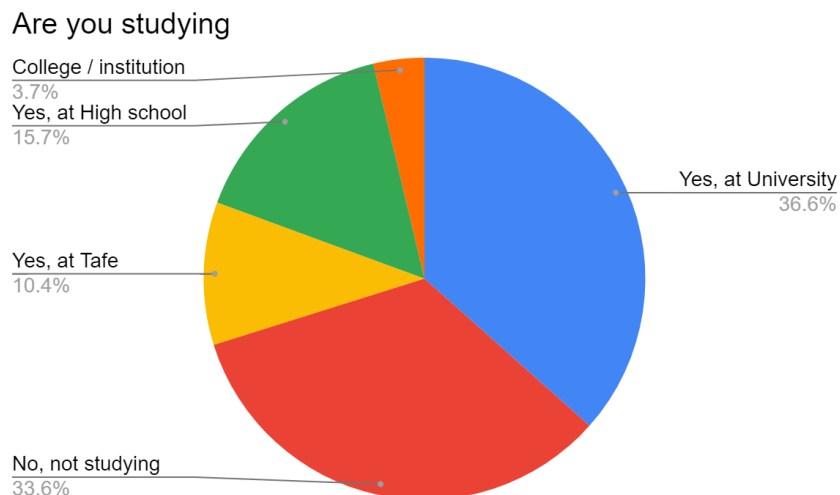


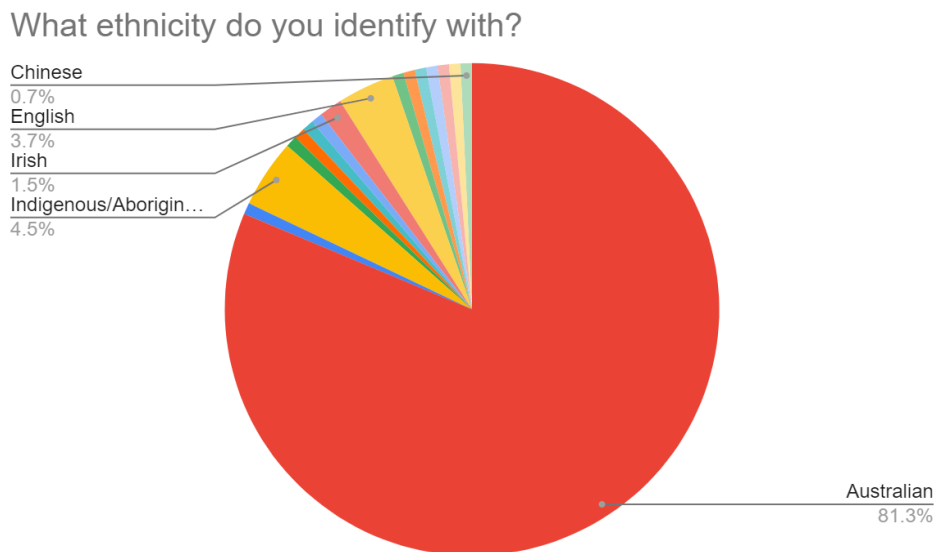
Figure 7: Vaccination issues

Most of the participants were studying in University (36.6%) and at High School (15.7%). 33.6% were not currently studying as shown in Figure 8.



*Figure 8: Education*

As per figure 9, the majority of youth identified as Australian (81%) with about 5% of the participants coming from an Indigenous background. 14% of participants identified to be from a foreign ethnicity.



*Figure 9: Participants' ethnicities*

Do you identify as someone living with a disability?

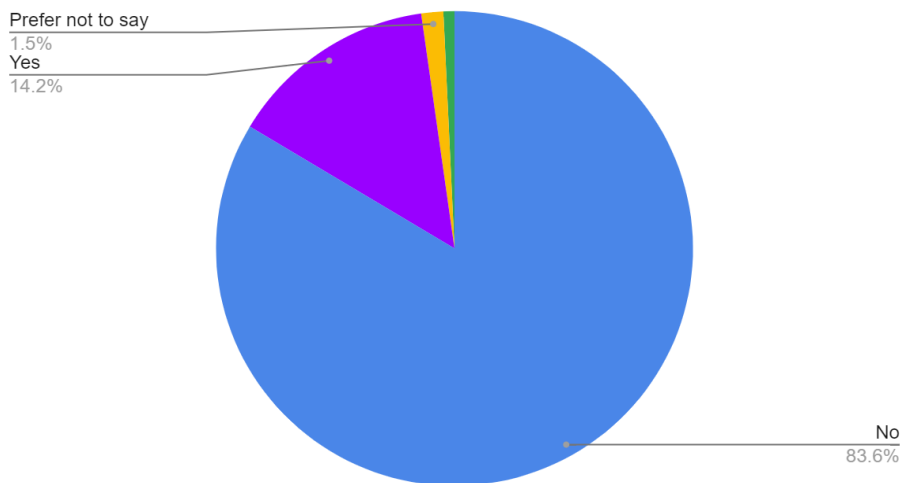


Figure 10: Participants living with disability

14.2% of participants identified as persons living with a disability, whereas 1.5% of youth preferred not to indicate their status in relation to disability, as shown in Figure 10.

In the past year, how personally concerned have you been about each of the following?

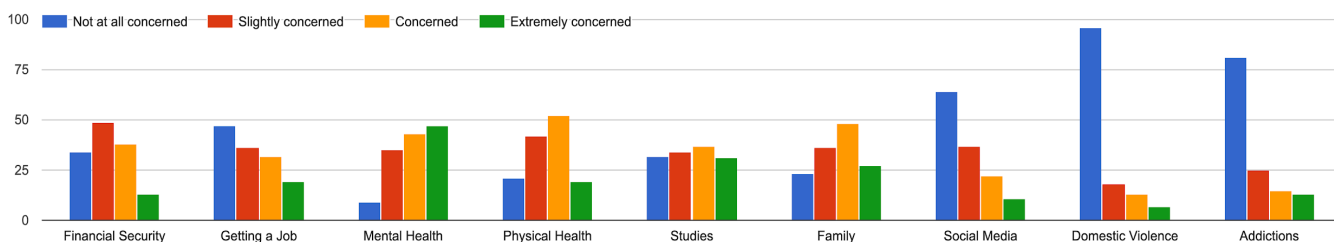


Figure 11: Participants' concerns during the pandemic in 2021

Figure 11 demonstrates that a major concern for young people during this period was their mental health, with 67% of participants listing being "concerned" or "extremely concerned" about their mental health. Other significant areas of concern were the participants' family, studies, and their physical health. Social media, domestic violence, and addictions were rated as the least of concern during the pandemic. Page 51 in the Appendices lists over 30 narrative responses from participants as to their topmost concern about the COVID-19.

In terms of mental health services, 64.2% of participants had not accessed any form of mental health services during the lockdown periods. 14.9% of youth rated the services they received as 'fair' or worse and 19.4% rated them as 'good' or better as shown in Figure 12.



134 responses

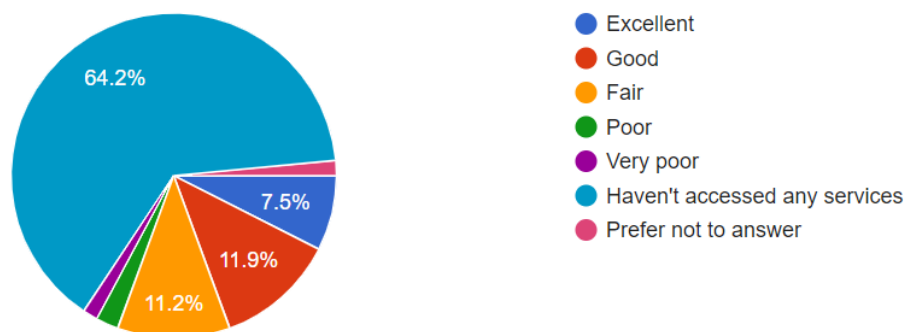


Figure 12: Rating of Mental Health services accessed by participants

134 responses

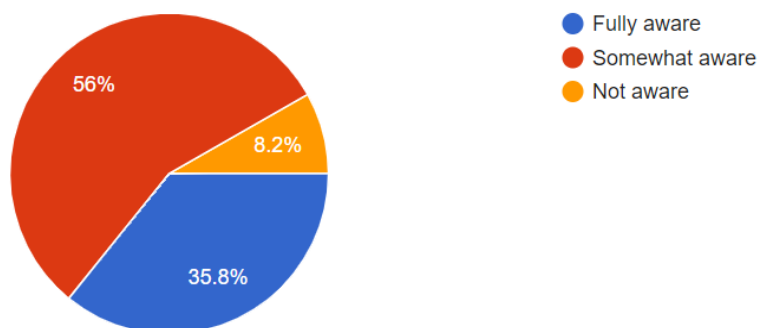


Figure 13: Mental Health Service Awareness

Regarding the awareness of available mental health services, 56% of participants were 'somewhat aware' of the mental health services, whilst 8.2% were not aware and 35.8% were fully aware as shown in Figure 13.

When youth were asked about their current mental health and wellbeing, 27.6% rated these areas as 'good' or better, 44% as fair, and 26.1% as 'poor' or worse as shown in Figure 14.

134 responses

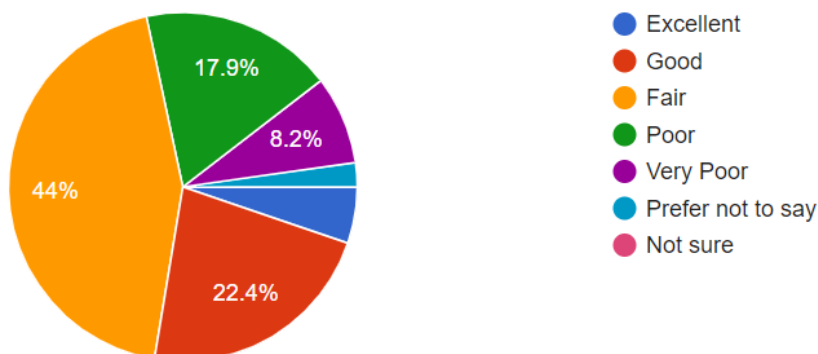


Figure 14: Mental Health status of participants

In terms of whether they were comfortable during the lockdown situation at the time of the Youth Survey, 50% of participants said they were 'comfortable', 'slightly comfortable', or felt 'no change', whilst the other 50% answered as feeling 'slightly uncomfortable' or 'uncomfortable.'

Thinking about how COVID-19 has impacted you, do you feel you have control over your life?

134 responses

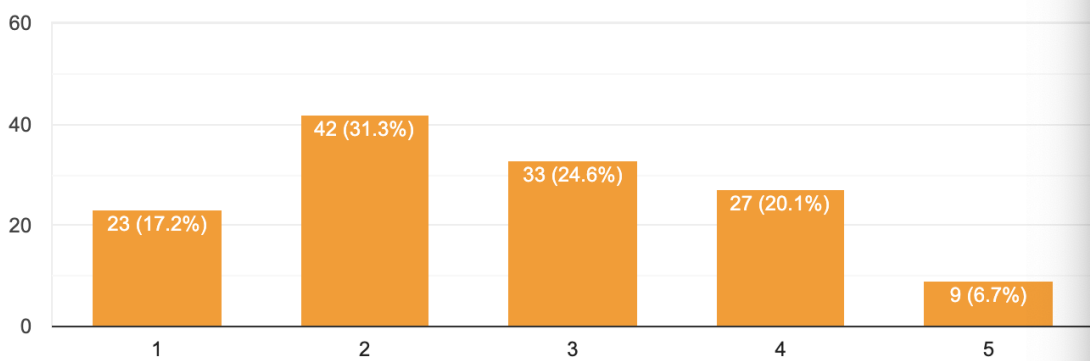


Figure 15: Participants' perceptions of control over their life

Participants' self-perceived levels of control during the pandemic were assessed using a 5-point scale with 1 and 5 representing 'no control' and 'full control' respectively. 48.5% of youth rated their level of control as 2 or less, and only 6.7% answered at level 5 (full control) as shown in Figure 15. In summary, 93.2% did not feel that they had control over their life during the pandemic.

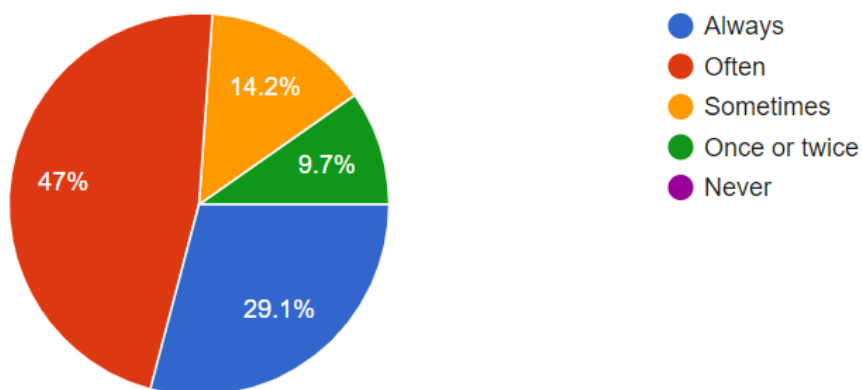


Figure 16: Participants' stress levels over June and July 2021

When asked about stress levels over the past two months, 29.1% of participants answered 'always' and 47% answered 'often', indicating that 76.1% of participants were stressed during the pandemic, as shown in Figure 16.

Furthermore, when assessing how participants coped with stress, 47.7% answered that they kept up with normal routines; 41.7% stated they exercised; 50.8% reached out to friends; 50% said they undertook activities they loved doing.

Have COVID-19 lockdowns negatively impacted your...

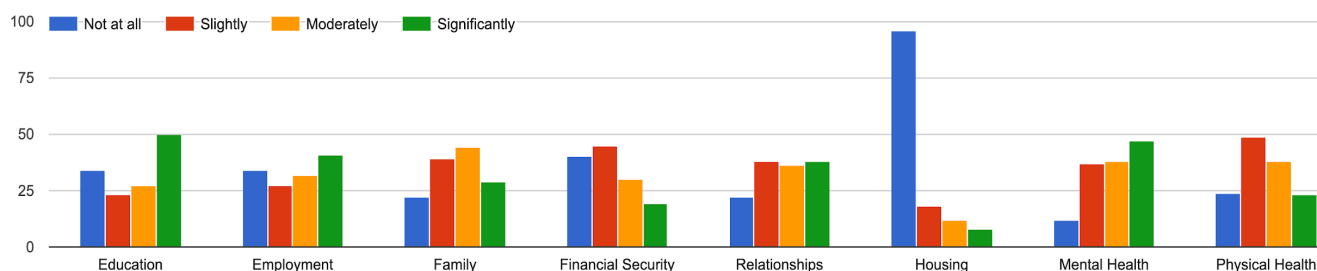


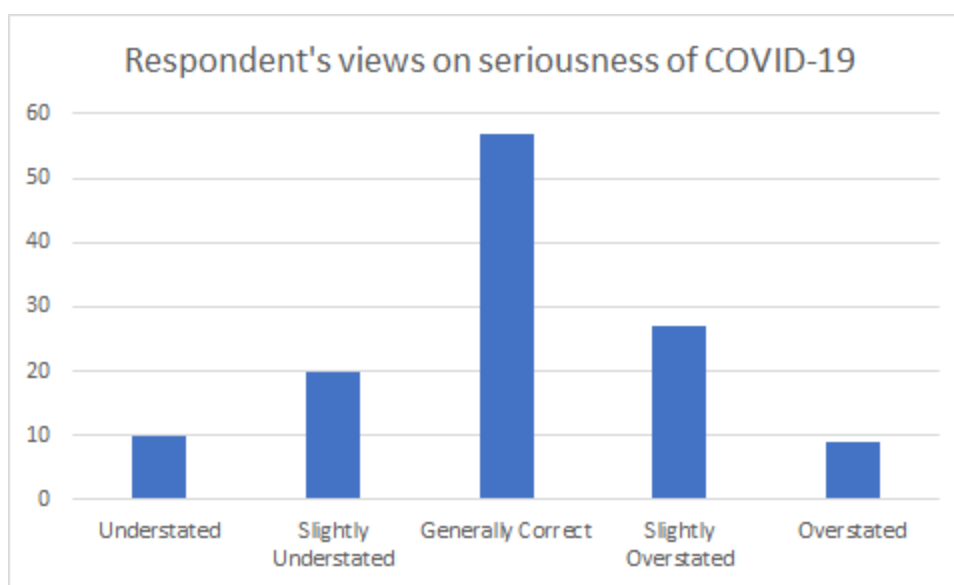
Figure 17: Participants' negative impacts of COVID-19

It was identified that a notable portion of participants rated their education (37.3%), mental health (35.1%), employment (30.6%), and relationships (28.4%) as areas significantly affected by COVID-19 as shown in Figure 17.

Participants were asked whether adequate support had been provided to those with disability during the pandemic: 6.7% answered yes, 35.8% answered no, and 57.4% were not sure or had not thought about it.

When viewing where participants received their information from, 68.7% gained it from social media, 62.7% from television news, 60.4% from the NSW Health website, 36.6% from word of mouth, 24.6% from radio, and 11.9% from internet forums.

When assessing participants' views on the representation of the seriousness of COVID-19 through the above avenues. As shown below in Figure 18, the majority of participants felt that the available representation was typically accurate.



*Figure 18: Participants' views on the accuracy of the seriousness of COVID-19 as it was represented to them*

Regarding how participants felt as to how COVID-19 restrictions had been communicated to them, 56% of youth felt that the communication was good or fair, with 44% feeling that it was poor.

When participants were asked to comment on what they were looking forward to when restrictions were eased, the most common responses amongst them included 'seeing friends and family,' 'travelling,' and 'exercising.'

## Discussion

### Mental Health and Wellbeing


The *ICFE Youth Survey* presents a clear picture of the experiences of young people aged between 18 and 26 living through the pandemic in 2021, and predominantly living in the Illawarra in NSW.

This survey identified mental health, physical health, studies, and family as areas of concern for young people of the Illawarra. Other areas such as domestic violence, social media, and addiction were rated as the least of concern during the pandemic. These responses highlighted that during this time of crisis, mental health was a predominant concern for youth, particularly in relation to their personal wellbeing. With 93.2% of participants feeling that they had little control over their life during the pandemic, and 76.1% of participants saying they were generally stressed, it is evident that these factors would have worsened the mental health of youth during the pandemic.

*“The impact these over the top and ineffective lockdowns and restrictions have had on our country and my community financially. The negative effective these things are having on people mental health”*

The results in terms of advocating for young people not being comfortable with lockdown restrictions, as well as how COVID-19 has impacted individual levels of control and stress over their life can be used as insight as to how young people have been affected by the lockdown.

The most common coping strategies for stress identified in the survey's results consisted of reaching out to friends (50.8%) and taking part in activities and hobbies they enjoy doing (50%). With these revelations and 47.7% saying they kept up with normal routines and 41.7% saying they exercised, it is good to see how youth have found personal ways to manage their stress. These results could be used to highlight what methods are most effective for youth in reducing stress currently working and therefore should be what methods can be promoted through mental health awareness and in advertisements during such health crises. Further research is required to identify how people with disabilities in the Illawarra are coping with COVID-19 challenges.



Although a substantial number of participants claimed to have poor or worse current mental health and wellbeing, a significant portion of participants had not accessed any mental health services or claimed to be only 'somewhat aware' of them. This potentially signifies a disconnect between how young people are feeling, the ease of access and availability of mental health services, and the communication of mental health services for young people. Due to the significance of mental health concerns for youth during this pandemic as indicated by the findings, further research is needed to identify the factors causing the gap in concern for mental health and the lack of mental health service awareness and access.

Other areas that were identified as being negatively impacted were education, employment, and relationships. A notable portion of participants rated their education (37.3%) and their mental health (35.1%) as areas significantly affected by COVID-19. Following this was employment (30.6%), and relationships (28.4%). Essentially, this demonstrates that education, mental health, employment and relationships were roughly of equal concern.

*"Why students must complete the HSC? This is a ridiculous outcome due to the harsh conditions we have already faced. I do not know a single student who wants to complete the HSC. we should not be put through this. All school has been online, I am very disappointed with how concerned the government seems that we must do the HSC."*

## Persons with a Disability

This survey is one of the only studies of youth in the Illawarra to provide an insight into the impacts of the pandemic on persons with a disability. Despite a small sample size of people identifying as a person with a disability, these results indicate that a considerable portion of participants' believe support for disability has been inadequate.

For persons with a disability, navigating both the physical and mental aspects of their health requires accessibility to as much information and care as possible. In periods of increased stress and instability, as was experienced during the pandemic, people with disabilities have encountered particular barriers to ensuring their safety and well-being as a result of the lack of recognition their community has received from national government schemes and the wider public.

*"As a disabled person I'm expendable. Liberal/national politicians consider me disposable".*

Further research is required to identify the areas in need of improvement regarding how people with disability in the Illawarra are coping with challenges during the pandemic and how they can be supported. However, it is evident that further funding into programs, organisations and health schemes are necessary to account for the gaps in integrated care.

## Information and Communication


The majority of participants received their information regarding COVID-19 from digital media, indicating that digital platforms would be the most efficient method of delivering future information. Regarding the way in which COVID-19 information was presented, the majority of participants found it to be either overstated or understated, and that it was communicated poorly or worse. These results highlight the lack of clarity within the media and calls for further effort in targeting information specifically for youth to resolve this. When the lack of clear and accurate information is seen in the context of how it might add to stress and feelings of low control over one's life, this is an important area that needs to be addressed.

*"Lack of freedoms, fear mongering. Regional areas were put into lockdowns where there weren't cases due to the fear of people traveling to and from Sydney to escape their current restrictions. Which I believe is unfair. The lack of clear information which lead to confusion for many people."*

## Existing Mental Health Care Service Models

Mid-September of 2021 saw the establishment of ten new mental health clinics across Sydney, the Illawarra and the Central Coast based on the Australian government's 'Head to Health Pop Up' model (<https://www.headtohealth.gov.au/popup>) established in Victoria during the 2020 lockdown. These pop-up clinics emerged as a response to public mental health concerns, leading to the federal government investing more money into bolstering support services, starting with New South Wales.

What made Head to Health Pop Up differ from other advertised mental health services was that it enabled users to speak with a trained clinician to guide them to the most appropriate service unique to them, rather than simply jumping into a service that may not adequately present them with the support they need. Offering video and phone supported mental health services and assessments, each clinic contains trained psychologists, mental health nurses, mental health occupational therapists, social workers and peer workers. Moreover, Head to Health Pop up offers its services to all people in NSW regardless of age, making it an accessible avenue of mental health support for youth in the Illawarra.



Whilst it is free to call Head to Health Pop Up central for advice and referral services, the clinics have acknowledged that not everyone who contacts them will be suitable for treatment at its mental health hub. Further, the only Head to Health clinic in the Illawarra is in Shellharbour. As such, other mental health services that were most targeted towards Youth in the Illawarra during this time, centred around hotline centres such as Lifeline and Headspace, as well as counselling services offered at high schools and at the University of Wollongong.

The University offers free counselling services to its students for up to 16 sessions. Although these were changed to remote phone appointments during the pandemic, in the months following the lifting of lockdown restrictions in 2021, these services have remained online, with no clear indication to students and potential users of when face-to-face counselling services. For students who do not have internet or telephone services at their disposal, accessing these services would pose difficulties, thus demonstrating the gaping divide existing between the youth of higher and lower socio-economic positions as to what mental health support services are available to them.



## Conclusion

"We have never treated mental health, in (parliament), on the same footing as physical health, ever," was reported in an article in the Illawarra Mercury<sup>5</sup> suggesting that it has become acceptable that mental health is treated with less seriousness than physical health.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had serious consequences for youth in the Illawarra as has been demonstrated by the results of the survey. The sharp rise in demand for mental health services throughout COVID-19 has been met instead with a lack of proper mental health treatment and a delayed response in implementing models where services can be established to fill in the gaps in services provided.

It is only by acknowledging the mental health and wellbeing of youth that appropriate avenues can be established to serve the needs of the youth during this ongoing pandemic.

This Report indicates that youth in the Illawarra were significantly impacted in various domains of their lives - including their mental health and wellbeing, their relationships, and their education. Despite this, a significant number of youth in the Illawarra did not access mental health services during the pandemic. According to the Survey findings, this seems to be due to youth not being fully aware of the mental health services available to them, and points to the gap in services from basic to higher level support.

The ICFE Youth Council's recommendations are significant and timely given the current changes in health risks and increase in the spread of the COVID-19 Omicron variant and the changing health information regarding building resistance to this variant.

In the event of future lockdowns, further care is needed to ensure that policy makers take into account why young people from diverse backgrounds are left feeling overly stressed and uncomfortable regarding the restrictions placed on them so that targeted approaches can be used to reduce their stress.

This study has provided youth in the Illawarra with a platform to voice their concerns about COVID-19. Their need for effective and clear information and mental health services must be supported by funding and engagement of all levels of government. This will directly improve the mental health of youth in this ongoing pandemic and will make them feel valued and included in our local, regional and national response to this pandemic.


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<sup>5</sup> Giannini, D. (2021). Mental health personal for psychologist MP. [online] Illawarra Mercury. Available at: [https://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/7524797/mental-health-personal-for-psychologist-mp/?channel=churned\\_paywall](https://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/7524797/mental-health-personal-for-psychologist-mp/?channel=churned_paywall) [Accessed 1 Dec. 2021].

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the Youth Survey, a number of recommendations can be made to alleviate the primary issue of mental health concerns of Illawarra youth, as well as in relation to COVID-19 information.

1. **Communication of the current COVID-19** pandemic needs to be centralised and easily made available to youth through targeted youth engagement platforms including social media, news programmes, educational institutions, workplaces and the community. This includes essential information regarding lockdown, restrictions and updates that target diverse youth and utilise the channels that their community engages in and increase their awareness of what services are available to them.
2. **Mental health clinics** must offer mental health services that are accessible and do not discriminate at any level, thus granting all youth the freedom to engage in appropriate strategies to cope with their mental health concerns, from basic to more serious concerns. Models such as those under the 'Head to Health Pop Up' model, as well as services offered by Secondary High Schools and UOW for counselling can be made available to a wider range of youth in communities across the Illawarra.
3. **Effective ways for reducing stress** in being identified in this study by youth, should be used in mental health awareness campaigns in the Illawarra and on a wider scale. Strategies such as doing things one loves and being with friends and family proved to be effective ways of coping and should be advertised via the media to youth, and to raise awareness in the community of the benefit of reaching out and connecting with youth.
4. **Information on COVID-19 vaccines** and their availability must be adapted so that youth from diverse communities are able to better understand and make informed choices as to their health. This would assist in alleviating the stress and anxiety that youth experience due to the lack of access to critical information regarding availability of vaccines during the pandemic and which vaccines suit them.
5. **Vaccines** need to be more readily available for all youth. Youth should be able to book and receive their vaccinations without hassle and as soon as possible. The list



of essential workers needs to be expanded to include those who do not have the option to work from home.

6. **Further research** is required to identify how youth with disabilities in the Illawarra are coping with COVID-19 challenges, and how they can be supported so that they receive integrated care and regularly updated information.
7. **Funding** is needed by local, regional and state governments to fund adequate and relevant mental health services for youth in the Illawarra. Basic and high level services ranging from avenues for youth to network and communicate what is on their mind, discussion groups with peers to professional counselling services would effectively address the gaps in mental health services for youth in the Illawarra during this pandemic.

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Mission Australia, 2021. Annual Youth Survey. Available at <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/research-impact-policy-advocacy/youth-survey>

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# ICFE YOUTH COUNCIL

Focusing on leadership development for purpose driven impactful change, the Youth Council was formed by ICfE to learn foundational leadership knowledge and skills, including stakeholder engagement and strategic communication, and be individually and collectively coached and mentored to implement their learning and develop their unique strengths.

As ICfE values, respects and seeks to give agency to underrepresented youth from diverse backgrounds, the Youth Council comprises diverse youth based in the Illawarra.

## Youth Council Members



### ALVIN CHUNG

Hi, I'm Alvin. I am currently studying Mechanical Engineering at the University of Wollongong. If I were to say where I'm from, I'd say I'm an ABC, Australian Born Chinese, but this wouldn't be a great summary, as although my parents are Chinese, they were born and raised in Malaysia, adding another layer to the cake of ancestry comprising my cultural identity. To put things simply, I'm an Australian.

I believe that having a strong cultural identity, and a great sense of belonging are both very important aspects of being an individual, and I'd like to share that with the rest of Australia. Right now, we face many issues including, but not exclusive to these, that our youth are struggling with today. Many marginalised groups are suffering, facing exclusion from society, and lacking a feeling of belonging that we all should have.

Although you and I might believe in these ideals, there are many who don't. To make a change, is to have a say, and I hope that we can all work together to tackle these issues and make Australia a more inclusive society, where we can

accept each other for who we are.

### AMAR SULTAN

Hi I'm Amar. I am in my fourth year of a Bachelor of Laws/ Bachelor of International Studies degree at the University of Wollongong. In correspondence with my studies, I have worked in different areas of the legal field, as I have a keen interest in affecting positive change in the lives of individuals from all walks of life. Coming from a culturally diverse background myself, I am passionate about recognising and bringing to light, issues affecting people of diverse and marginalised communities.





### BEN JOHNS

Hi, I'm Ben. I'm currently employed with the Flagstaff Group in their Fine Food division as a Production Supervisor. I was promoted to this role in 2021, having been in the role of Production and Delivery Assistant Leading Hand. Prior to that I was Support Worker for the Flagstaff Group SLES ( School Leaver Employment Service) program. I am currently undergoing my Certificate 4 in Leadership and Management with the Australian College of Higher Studies and have completed my Certificate 3 in Individual Support (Disability). Some of my achievements are learning basic Auslan (Australian sign language), overcoming all different challenges during the early stage of the Covid-19 pandemic, resuming learning musical instruments, completing work/life goals and overcoming barriers with having a verbal disability (verbal dyspraxia).

### BEN HEALEY

Hi, I'm Ben. I'm currently in my second year of the Bachelor of Psychological Science at the University of Wollongong. Initially, I did 2 years of Engineering at UOW, but felt that I would be more suited to studying psychology, as I am more interested in understanding and assisting people. I have volunteered with UOW Pulse and have participated in ocean clean-ups, assisting students through wellness activities, as well as helping with various events held at UOW. I am currently in training to become a Lifeline Telephone Crisis Supporter, as I believe it is a good opportunity to provide assistance to those facing adverse challenges through their daily lives. I believe that developing a better understanding of mental health is much required in today's society.



### ISHAN DATAR

Hi I'm Ishan. I'm a Master of Business (Management & Innovation and Entrepreneurship) graduate from University of Wollongong. I also have a Bachelor of Technology in Computer Science and a Diploma in Business Management from Symbiosis Institute of Business Management. I have worked in different industries like Energy Auditing, Marketing, Facilities Management and in a research centre. My idea to build a decentralised automated closed loop system for growing food, value creation and enabling people to start micro-businesses, got selected into a pre-accelerator program at Catalysr. For the past year I have been working on a new energy management start-up which assists SMEs to save utilities by about 12-20% using Artificial Intelligence and Smart devices. This also assists businesses in implementing UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Currently, I have tenure at iAccelerate, Wollongong as a part of the "Grow" program. I am also interested in Supply Chain

Management, Operations and Philosophy.

### TRISTAN JAMES

Hi I'm Tristan. I'm a proud Dharawal Man from the Wollongong region. I am currently in my third year of the Bachelor of Engineering, majoring in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Wollongong. I hope to graduate at the end of 2022 and be employed in the renewable energy sector. I have completed multiple Engineering internships. I am currently working part time at a café local to Wollongong and playing AFL for the Wollongong Lions in my spare time. I am passionate about the local Indigenous community and have been a part of the Woolyungah Indigenous Centre (WIC) since I started university, completing my first mentoring program as a part of the WIC and UOWx this year. I have also been a part of the Indigenous programs, IAES (Indigenous Australian Engineering Schools) where I was introduced to many Indigenous peoples in the Engineering sector, and met with major companies doing work with the IAES. CareerTrackers is another First Nations program I am a part of, which has enabled me to gain employment in Jacobs, an Engineering consultancy firm in North Sydney. This has further contributed to my professional development as I have attended their yearly consult with over 2500 business members. Some of my hobbies include playing team sports, chess and watching the AFL.



## Appendices

### ICfE Survey

#### ICfE Survey on Youth and COVID-19

This survey is for youth living in the Illawarra who are 18 years old to 26 years old. It seeks to ask questions about yourself and your concerns relating to the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. There is no right or wrong answer. We only wish to hear your personal opinions. Your responses will help us as a Youth Council advocate on your behalf to improve how issues affecting you during this period are being addressed.

An analysis of your responses, along with the appropriate recommendations, will be published in our report that will be freely available and provided to relevant organisations and managers to inform policy and action. Your answers to this survey will be kept confidential and you will not be identified in any reports released from this survey.

You can find more information about ICfE's commitment to enabling youth and addressing the concerns affecting them at <http://illawarracfe.com/youth-council/icfe-youth-council/>

The wellbeing of young people is at the heart of ICfE. If any of the questions in this Survey raises any issues or concerns that you find upsetting and you would like to talk to someone, you may choose to contact Lifeline Australia on 13 11 14 or go to

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Alternatively, you may contact Headspace on 1800 650 890 or go to

<https://headspace.org.au/eheadspace/>

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\* Required

#### 1. Informed consent \*

*Check all that apply.*

- I am happy to complete the survey as I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.
- I would rather not complete the survey

2. Which of these areas are you currently living in? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Rural Australia  
 Metropolitan  
 Regional

3. What is your postcode? \*

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you currently live... \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Alone  
 With family  
 In a group home  
 With friends/housemates  
 With partner

5. Are you... \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Male  
 Female  
 Agender/non-gendered  
 Non-binary  
 Transgender  
 Prefer not to say  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_



## 6. Age range \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- 18-19
- 20-21
- 22-23
- 24-26

## 7. What ethnicity do you identify with? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Australian
- English
- Chinese
- Indian
- Indigenous/Aboriginal Australian
- Irish
- Italian
- German
- Greek
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## 8. Do you identify as someone living with a disability? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say
- Not sure



9. What are the highest restrictions you have faced during the past two months? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Level 1: COVID-19 Low: (masks indoors)
- Level 2: COVID-19 Moderate: (masks in all public areas)
- Level 3: COVID- 19 High: (stay at home order, essential travel, travel distance restrictions, masks mandatory)
- Level 4: COVID- 19 Very High: (stay at home order, curfew, work permits, exercise limits, masks mandatory)
- Not sure

10. Have you received the first COVID-19 vaccination dose? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes, Astrazeneca
- Yes, Pfizer
- No, I am planning to receive it
- No, I am not planning to receive it

11. If you received the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccination or are planning to, what barriers did you encounter? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Did not want Astrazeneca
- Not enough supply of Astrazeneca
- Not enough supply of Pfizer
- Awareness of the rare condition linked to blood clots with Astrazeneca
- No appointments available for Astrazeneca
- No appointments available for Pfizer
- Lengthy waiting period for Astrazeneca
- Lengthy waiting period for Pfizer
- Lack of eligibility for Pfizer
- Medicare status
- Lack of information
- There weren't any barriers

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

#### Study and Occupation

12. Are you currently studying? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes, at University
- Yes, at High school
- Yes, at Tafe
- No, not studying
- College / institution

13. What is your highest level of education? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Undergraduate
- Postgraduate
- TAFE
- Year 10
- Year 12
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

14. Do you feel that there are any barriers that have impacted your study/work goals due to COVID-19? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Not studying/working
- Not sure

15. Do you currently have any paid work? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes, I am in paid work classified as essential work
- Yes, and due to restrictions I am receiving Covid-19 disaster payments
- No, I am receiving Covid-19 disaster payments
- No, I am looking for work
- No, I am not looking for work
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Mental  
Health &  
Wellbeing

The wellbeing of young people is at the heart of ICfE. If any of the questions in this Survey raises any issues or concerns that you find upsetting and you would like to talk to someone, you may choose to contact Lifeline Australia on 13 11 14 or go to <https://www.lifeline.org.au/> Alternatively, you may contact Headspace on 1800 650 890 or go to <https://headspace.org.au/eheadspace/>

16. In the past year, how personally concerned have you been about each of the following? \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Not at all concerned	Slightly concerned	Concerned	Extremely concerned
Financial Security	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting a Job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mental Health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Domestic Violence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Addictions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. If you have accessed mental health services during the lockdown, how would you rate them? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very poor
- Haven't accessed any services
- Prefer not to answer

18. How aware are you of mental health services that are available to you? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Fully aware
- Somewhat aware
- Not aware

19. In general, how would you rate your current mental health and wellbeing? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very Poor
- Prefer not to say
- Not sure

20. What is your top most concern about the COVID-19 situation in Australia? \*

\_\_\_\_\_

21. How comfortable are you with your current lockdown situation? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Comfortable
- Slightly comfortable
- No change
- Slightly uncomfortable
- Uncomfortable

22. Thinking about how COVID-19 has impacted you, do you feel you have control over your life? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
No control	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Full control

23. In the past two months, how often have you felt stressed? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Once or twice
- Never

24. If you have experienced stress during the past two months, how did you deal with it? Choose one or more as they apply.

*Check all that apply.*

- Kept up normal routines
- Exercised
- Reached out to friends
- Reached out to family
- Used positive thinking
- Did things I love doing
- Sought mental health services
- Found information from trustworthy sources to keep up-to-date
- Stepped away from media
- Wrote down my concerns and possible solutions/plans

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

Personal & Community Concerns



25. Have COVID-19 lockdowns negatively impacted your... \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Significantly
Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Security	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relationships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mental Health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

26. Do you feel that there has been adequate support provided to meet the particular needs and requirements of people with disability during the pandemic? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Haven't thought about it
- Not sure

27. Where do you receive your information regarding COVID-19 (E.g., New restrictions, statistics)? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Television news  
 Radio  
 Social Media  
 New South Wales health website  
 Word of mouth  
 Internet forums

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

28. Thinking about the information that you have received, in your view the seriousness of COVID-19 is... \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Overstated  
 Slightly overstated  
 Generally correct  
 Slightly understated  
 Understated  
 Not sure

29. Rate how clearly the current COVID-19 restrictions have been communicated to you. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very poor
- Not sure

30. What is one thing that you are looking forward to doing when restrictions are eased in general? \*

Your  
feedback is  
greatly  
appreciated

You have reached the end of our Youth Survey and we cannot thank you enough for your time and support. Be assured that your responses will be collectively analysed and will assist us in raising awareness of what youth in the Illawarra are experiencing. Our recommendations will call for improvements.

Our Report will be released at <http://illawarracfe.com> and will be presented to relevant managers and organisations.

Once again, we are extremely grateful for your contribution, your valuable time and your perspectives.

ICfE Youth Council (<http://illawarracfe.com/youth-council/icfe-youth-council/>)

31. If you would like to be emailed our Report, please provide your email address. This will not be used to identify any responses and will not be disclosed to anyone. Thank you. (optional)

## Narrative Responses from participants to the question, 'What is the top most concern about the COVID-19 situation in Australia?'

34 participants responded. Their unedited responses are presented below:

- *Elderly unable to see family*
- *Misinformation*
- *My family*
- *Anti-vaccination groups*
- *When the lockdown will end and what we can do. I've also had an 18th birthday in lockdown and want to have a party for it sometime soon.*
- *Mental health*
- *Lockdowns*
- *Anti-astazeneca propagana pushed by the media.*
- *concerned about HSC/schooling*
- *Haven't been able to find work*
- *People not self-isolating, people breaking Covid restrictions*
- *Extended lockdown periods*
- *Mandating of vaccine and loss of personal choice and/or freedom*
- *Get vaccine*
- *The lack of transparency about the long-term impacts, strain on the healthcare system and deaths that will occur when we relax restrictions*
- *The national border being closed for such a long time.*
- *Ensuring that the government manages the health concerns appropriately and doesn't rush into anything*
- *Seeing family*
- *Mismanagement and misinformation*

- *The mental health of my friends and family*
- *Travel*
- *We are never going back to normal*
- *The lockdowns continuing for a very long time*
- *Mandated vaccines, vaccines passports and discrimination against those people who choose not to be vaccinated.*
- *access to Pfizer vaccines*
- *Extended lockdowns preventing me from travelling to visit family and friends (particularly interstate travel)*
- *High daily infection rates*
- *Getting enough people vaccinated.*
- *Family getting sick & no travelling*
- *The isolation and fear of getting Covid*
- *The health of my community*
- *being stuck inside*
- *The lockdown being extended.*
- *The economy*
- *Whether 80% vaccination will actually see life return to somewhat normal.*
- *Not being able to travel and catch up with mates/family*
- *That individuals have such confirmation bias that nothing can change their minds because they truly believe the lies that are being forced down their throats by social media and social media influencers.*
- *Mainly lack of jobs and economic value to enable more jobs to come along*
- *Will it take away more years form my life*
- *When restrictions ease in NSW i am worried about hospitals becomming overworked without beds, for australia in general i am worried about extremists and people lack of compassion when not following public saftey rules*

- *Now that I know my mum isn't going to die, it's the wasted opportunity for change the whole situation has entailed. Houellebecq presaged accurately; there was no "Great Reset". Market Liberalism stil prevails*
- *not able to see my friends or famliy or go on hoilday*
- *Irregularity in the message we are being told from all tiers of government.*
- *The impact these over the top and ineffective lockdowns and restrictions have had on our country and my community financially. The negative effective these things are having on people mental health. And the fact millions of people have been conned into having a vaccination that does stop people dying from covid and has not been properly tested or put through trials.*
- *That we meant never get out of lockdown*
- *The contact between NSW health and close contacts is extremely poor. There was a Covid case in the Kiama downs IGA and close contacts and people who were exposed still have not been contacted. NSW health needs to make close contact connectors for different areas (a team for rural NSW, a team for regional and a team for metropolitan). With the high amount of case in Sydney compared to the rest of NSW it isn't an efficient way of contacting close contacts.*
- *I am concerned that opening up too early will ruin all our hard work for such a long time*
- *Restrictions tightening, not being able to see close friends and family, mental health, addiction*
- *It would be nice if uni was in person other than that I'm not concerned*
- *wording of restrictions*
- *The mental heath of my peers and friends*
- *Lack of freedoms, fear mongering. Regional areas were put into lockdowns where there wasn't cases due to the fear of people traveling to and from Sydney to escape their current restrictions. Which i believe is unfair. The lack of clear information which lead to confusion for many people.*
- *Unfair mandatory vaccinations*
- *Cant get vaccinated, NSW easing restrictions too early*
- *going into another lockdown*
- *Will it ever go back to normal*
- *Education*

- *When lockdowns will end*
- *Health outcomes and deaths*
- *People not caring or think they are above the restrictions*
- *that people are stupid and not getting the vaccine*
- *top most concern is how the heck am I meant to believe anything when the more vaccines people get the more cases we have and that our premier and the doctors are now being arrested...*
- *How poorly it has been managed, and how the flow on effect has worsened the already overrun mental health services available*
- *Lack of priority for health of young people by govt and health professionals*
- *Struggling to see life returning to normal*
- *Unvaccinated people spreading covid in the community, particularly restaurants when restrictions ease.*
- *How we will recover financially as individuals and as a nation*
- *How it'll effect the economy in the future*
- *No informed consent available.*
- *lack of ability to travel*
- *Not seeing family and friends impact on relationships*
- *The never ending lockdown and its effect on our freedom to live a social life.*
- *Everyone's mental health*
- *No*
- *My mental health*
- *Employment*
- *People need to listen*
- *Restricted activities*
- *Delta infections*
- *The safety of people I know*

- 
- *The negativity building amongst the population as we become more and more divided by controversial issues. Also either myself or loved ones getting COVID and the lifelong ramifications of it.*
  - *The community. They cannot seem to follow simple rules/laws.*
  - *Leading to a defeated music & events industry*
  - *Spread of the disease and resulting number of deaths*
  - *People not getting vaccinated*
  - *That daily case numbers wont go down*
  - *Everyone's mental health, loss of income for family and friends, missing my family and friends, side effects of vaccine*
  - *That life wont be normal*
  - *Failure to establish quarantine facilities by the federal government, spread of misinformation, icu capacity*
  - *My studies mostly, as music is very difficult online*
  - *that i'm wasting my youth isolating at home when i should be travelling*
  - *my own mental health and how I can deal with it whilst still being present*
  - *Financial support going to companies already making millions, why my friends and I struggle to afford rent and food on youth allowance*
  - *As a disabled person I'm expendable. Liberal/national politicians consider me disposable*
  - *not sure*
  - *Mental Health*
  - *Long periods of lockdown*
  - *the vaccinations and freedom*
  - *That the rates will only get higher*



## Poster

A sample poster that was used to promote the Youth Survey at <https://illawarracfe.com/category/youth-council/>



Illawarra Centre for Enablement

# YOUTH SURVEY

## For Illawarra Youth 18yrs – 26yrs old

**WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES OF THE COVID19 PANDEMIC**

As members of the Illawarra Centre for Enablement (ICfE's) Youth Council, we would like to invite you to participate in our Illawarra Youth Survey to help us understand your experiences, views and concerns about the Covid19 Pandemic.

Your responses will help us advocate on your behalf to improve how issues affecting you that are related to Covid19 are being addressed.

Your responses are confidential and will not be released to anyone. Only our analysis of your responses and recommendations will be published in our Report that will be freely available and provided to relevant organisations and managers to inform policy and action.

The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. If any of the questions raise any issues or become upsetting and you would like someone to talk with, you can call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Headspace on 1800 650 890 or go to [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au).

If you have any questions, please contact the Youth Council at [youthcouncil@illawarracfe.com](mailto:youthcouncil@illawarracfe.com). More information about who we are, and the aims of the Youth Council is at <http://illawarracfe.com/youth-council/icfe-youth-council/>.

*Thanks very much for your participation and support.*

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**THE SURVEY WILL CLOSE 11:59PM ON 21 OF SEPTEMBER 2021.**

**PARTICIPATE IN THE YOUTH SURVEY AT:**

[Youth Survey for Illawarra Youth](#)

Youth Council of ICfE Illawarra Centre for Enablement (ICfE) [www.Illawarracfe.com](http://www.Illawarracfe.com)

## Illawarra Centre for Enablement



The Illawarra Centre for Enablement has been founded by Dr Diann Rodgers-Healey. The Vision of the Illawarra Centre for Enablement (ICfE) featured at <https://illawarracfe.com/> is:

- to enable youth, women and men from all backgrounds in the Illawarra to lead with confidence, clarity of purpose and courage, and achieve impact
- to enable the agency and inclusion of underrepresented individuals and communities in the Illawarra
- to raise the civic life of Illawarra communities by building knowledge, skills, values and motivation to advance the Illawarra's social fabric and its collective power.
- to encourage, and recognise the valuable leadership contributions that individuals, communities and businesses make to improve life in the Illawarra

The Illawarra Centre for Enablement acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as First Australians and we pay our respect to their ongoing deep connection to land and community. ICfE's work takes place on the land of the Wodi Wodi people, who are a part of the Dharawal Nation.